# Women in Entrepreneurship: Examining the Role of Female Leadership in Fostering Sustainable Development Practices

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# Research Project - PRODIGEES

To create a deeper understanding of the **impact of digitalization** on society, the economy and the environment in different world regions, and to **draw conclusions on the conditions for shaping digitalization towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** of the United Nation's (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

**Chapter 1: Brazil**

FGV EBAPE Sustainability and Leadership Track - Amazon Experience

**Chapter 2: Germany**

IDOS Environmental Governance and Transformation to Sustainability

**Chapter 3: Brazil**

FGV EBAPE Sustainability and Leadership Track - Amazon Experience

# What we know?

**Women are highly aware of the seriousness of climate change** and almost half of them (48%) believe it is the biggest challenge citizens face (Data from Germany & Brazil: EIB: 2019-2020 climate survey; IPCC, 2022).

**In Brazil, women have banded together to defend their traditional, sustainable way of life**, making them strong agents in the **fight against climate change** (IPCC 2022). **In Germany**, more women (87%) have **ethical and environmental concerns about food waste** than men (76%) (German Environment Agency, 2016).

Much research has demonstrated how **women are uniquely positioned as stewards of natural resources** (Cavendish, et al., 2000; Fernandez, 2008; Nightingale, 2011) and their **role in economic development** (FAO, 2011).

**Women's greater concern** positions them as **leaders of sustainable development efforts** (Shinbrot et al., 2019).

**The differences between women and men (worldwide)** in perceiving the gravity of environmental crises is linked to what researchers call the **"eco-gender gap",** which is clearly observed in household routines (mostly carried out by women), but also through women who are agents for driving green transformation in public life, assuming leadership positions and pursuing entrepreneurial paths, all enabling environmental impacts (Fernandez et al., 2021; Shinbrot, et al., 2019; Raman et al., 2022).

In entrepreneurship research, it is the **women-led businesses that bring a more innovative environment and greater business prospects** when considering firm survival (Cunningham, et al., 2017; Weber & Zulehner, 2010).

# What we DON'T know?

**Although leadership roles** in sustainable development have become **more androgynous**(Acevedo-Duque et al., 2021; Shinbrot, et al., 2019; UN, 2013; among others), **it is unclear:**

> **what the role and place of women are as entrepreneurs;**
> **how the gendered aspects of leadership are related to sustainability;**
> **which challenges and barriers they face as leaders and entrepreneurs;**

Also, potential **barriers** evidenced by research are mostly related to **gender norms and congruency,** such as the "think manager-think male, think follower-think female" phenomena and "Competent but cold x Warm but incompetent" (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Braun et al., 2017; Fiske, 2010), but:

> **what are the strengths and opportunities in local businesses related to sustainable development?**

**Since gender roles and women's challenges are embedded in culture**, and the way these are constructed (and perceived) is ambiguous, shifting, multiple, and diverse (Nightingale, 2011):

> **How local culture and history may shape women's engagement in entrepreneurship?**

Moreover, women's access, capacity, skills and productivity are **also related to men's awareness and proactivity** (Glazebrook, Noll & Opoku, 2020), but:

> **What is the role of men? Who are these actors?**

# Theoretical Background

**Women in Entrepreneurship for Sustainability**

Women are the key agents for development and catalytic for transformation in the economy, society, culture and in fostering sustainable development, contributing to the growth of the economy (Jabeen et al., 2020; Warren-Smith and Jackson, 2004).

**Literature is still immature, but four different themes are analyzed when investigating women in entrepreneurship and sustainability:**

1) **gender differences and how women become entrepreneurs while considering the green economy, compared to men;**

2) **the impact of the female workforce participating in entrepreneurial activities and its relevance regarding sustainability;**

3) **the importance of female entrepreneurship and its link with sustainable tourism development;**

4) **Other topics such as the 5M Framework: Market opportunities, management, money, meso environment, macro environment;**

Specifically related to the **Agrifood system, rural women entrepreneurship literature has not reached consensus in findings** and the direction of the studies conducted is not yet established (Aggarwal & Johal, 2021)

# Theoretical Background

**<u>How leadership is transmitted: the mechanisms of leadership</u>**

The means by which leadership is enacted (Hernandez, et al., 2011);

Leadership processes and theories can be categorized by four mechanisms: **traits, behaviors, cognition, and affect**, representing relatively independent categories.

- **Traits**: are the stable, enduring qualities and patterns of individuals' emotions, thoughts, and behaviors; can occur at the individual and collective level; can produce behavioral patterns;

- **Behaviors**: express actions that make leadership possible;

- **Cognition**: focus on the thoughts and sense-making processes related to leadership; how scripts and schemas influence the ways leadership is conducted and ultimately perceived and interpreted.

- **Affect**: captures the emotions and moods involved in leadership; the ability to connect, thus influencing how leadership develops and is perceived

# Gaps

The Sustainable Development Goals were accepted by 193 member nations of the UN in 2015, and they reflect a general understanding of the **importance of gender equality in sustainable development (UN Women, 2014).**

Yet, although literature on feminist political ecology, ecofeminism, gendered organization, and hegemonic masculinity provide guidance for what we expect to be the major barriers and contributions of women leaders in sustainable development, women's path to leadership in the sustainable development field, however, is not clearly charted out.

Also, the synergy and synergetic interaction between the perspectives on 'women in entrepreneurship', 'female Leadership' and 'sustainable entrepreneurship' have been underexplored;

And finally, although much is known about contextual conditions that enable women to become entrepreneurs (education, technology, and more), other personal perspectives of local actors and relationships are often ignored.
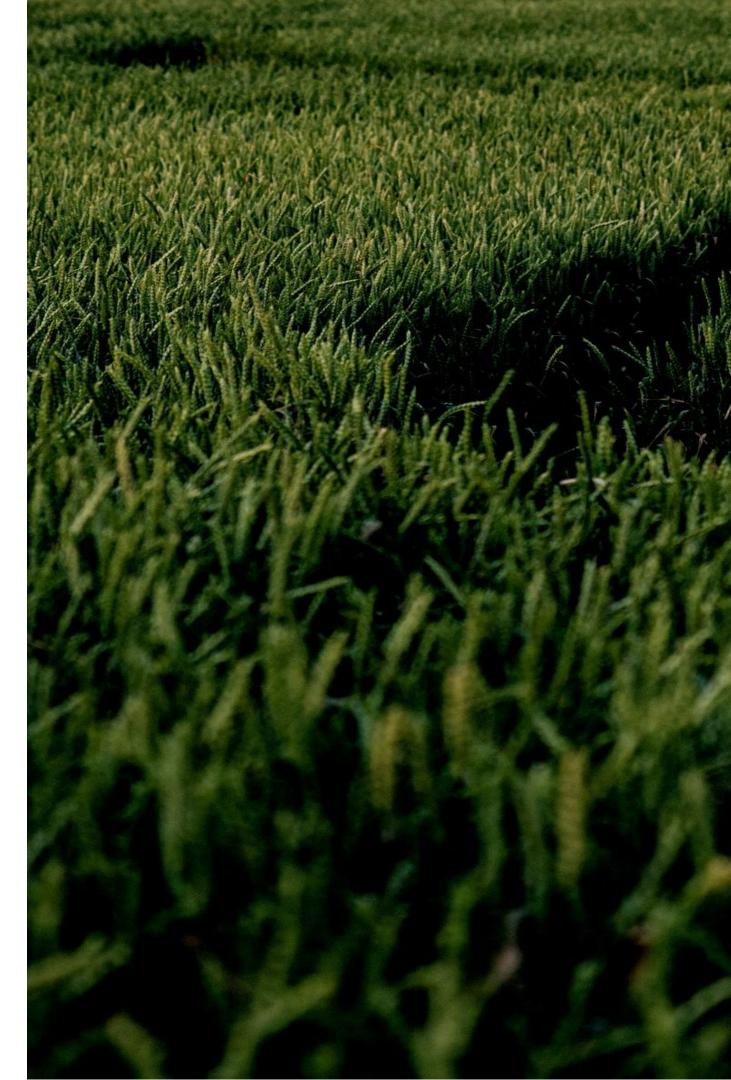
# Method

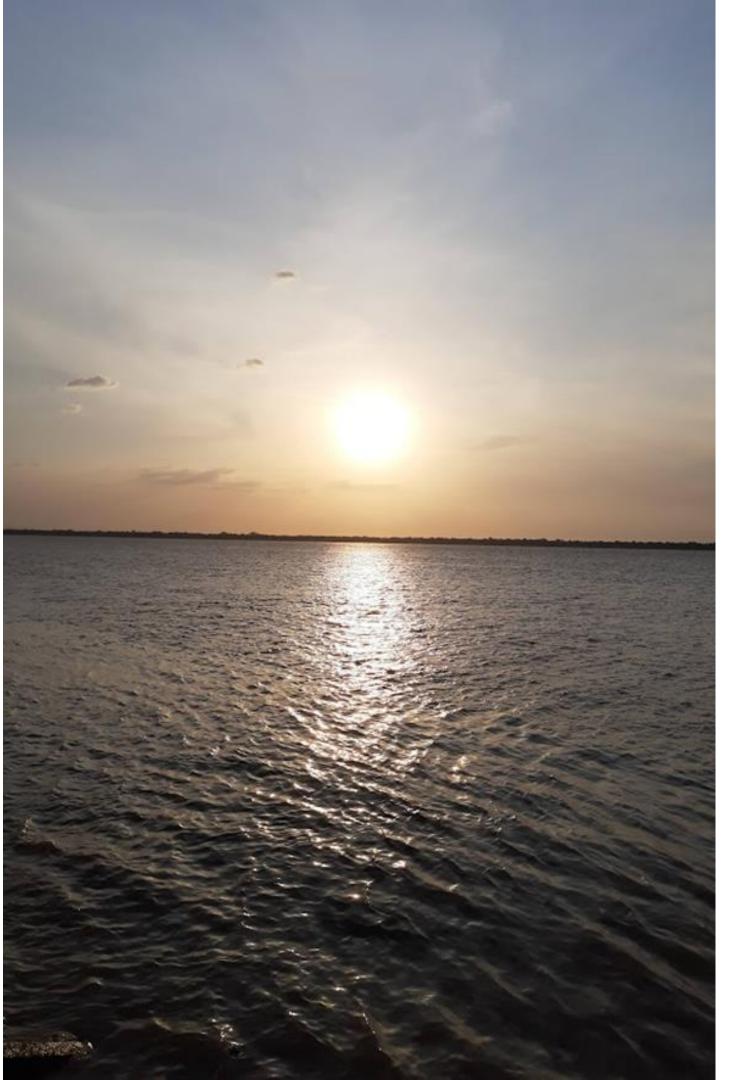This is an exploratory research, following Grounded Theory procedures (Charmaz, 2014).

Grounded Theory was chosen because the phenomenon analyzed does not have a specific theoretical characterization; that is, **the field of leadership for sustainability is still in an exploratory and developing phase.**

This study was conducted through **interviews with 33 female entrepreneurs** that founded/co-founded locally recognized and impactful sustainable businesses, in Brazil and Germany.

Participants were **grounded in the sustainable development field**: Farmers, Organic Market shop owners, Zero-Waste shop owners, Chefs and Restauranteurs, Food Production (Chocolate, Tofu, Cheese), BioJewel, Soap Production.

The 33 Women had a mean age of 36 years old, with different time of experience in the business.

# Data collection and analysis

**Four waves of data collection and analysis were undertaken** with the intention of creating a grounded model that emerged from the data:

In the first stage of data collection, **8 women were interviewed** using an initial version of our interview protocol, with 10 open-ended questions.

Subsequently, **the cross-sectional data were analyzed**, generating first-order codes. These initial codes led us to adaptations to the protocol, and this new protocol was used to interview **9 women**.

After this step, a **2 waves of data analysis and adaptation** of the protocol were carried out, conducting **7 and 9 interviews**, respectively.

During the waves of data analysis, first-order codes were grouped into second-order codes and then into aggregate dimensions. This process led to the creation of first-order codes (more descriptive), second-order codes and aggregate dimensions (more analytical).

# Framework

**Contextual Conditions:**
- **Family needs**
- **Local cultural artifacts**
- **Societal Needs**
- **Community Bonds**
- **Men as allies**

**Internal conditions:**
- **Maternal /Family role models**
- **Connection with nature**
- **Environmental thinking**
- **Commitment to give back**

**Conditions for Sustainable entrepreneurship**

## Women Leaders

- **Being**
  - Traits and personality
  - Gender identity
  - Gender roles
  - Entrepreneurial and mgmt skills

- **Doing**
  - Leadership Styles
  - Agency and Communality

- **Thinking**
  - Perceptions and beliefs
  - Discrimination, resilience, resignation and acceptance of barriers for women

- **Feeling**
  - Maternity
  - Fertility
  - Self-conscious emotions

**Macro**
- **Sustainable production**
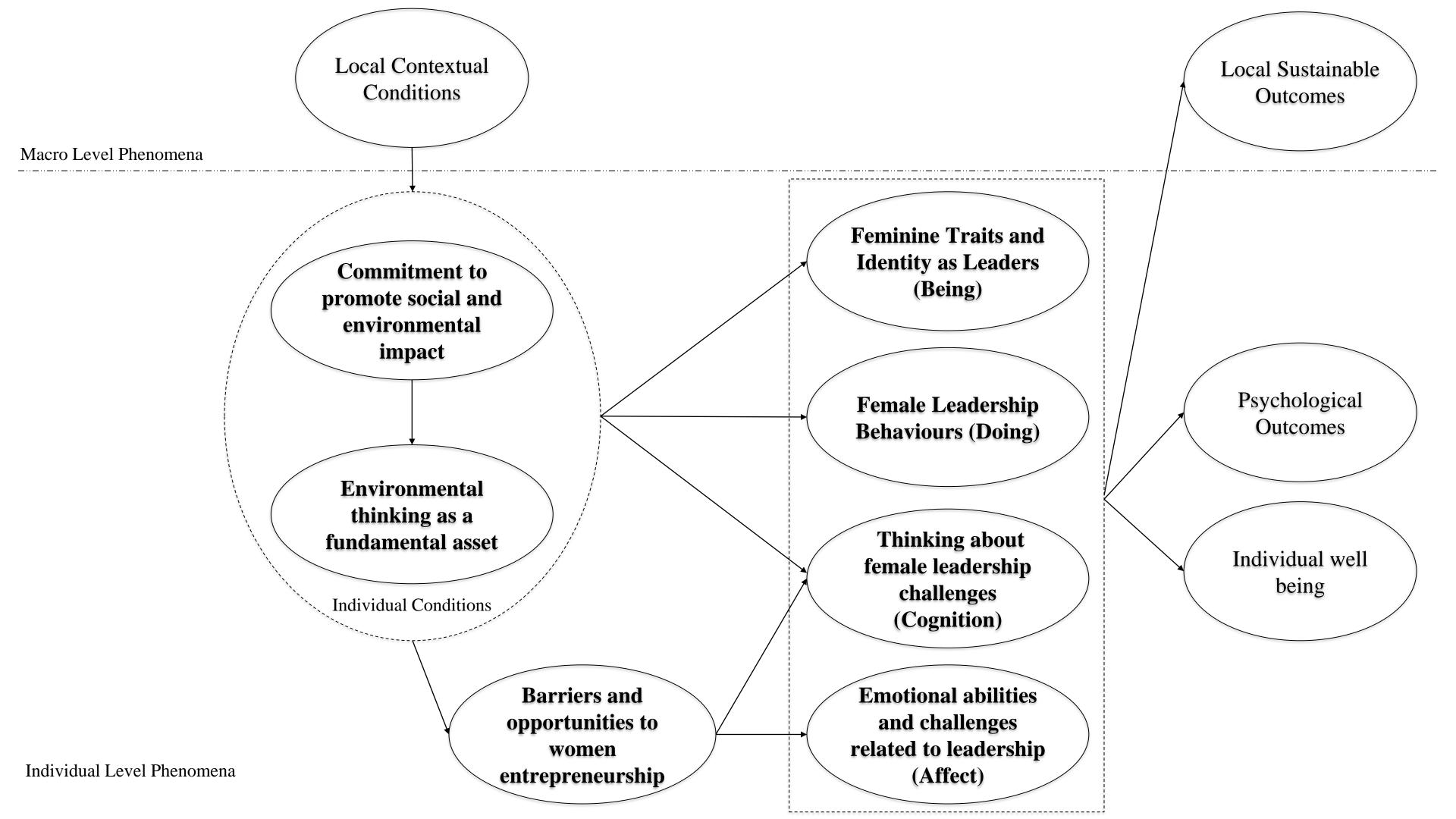- **Sustainability awareness**
- **Partnerships**
- **Community engagement**
- **Women empowerment**

**Micro**
- **Self-leadership**
- **Self-confidence**

**Actions / Outcomes**

Local Contextual Conditions

Local Sustainable Outcomes

Macro Level Phenomena

Commitment to promote social and environmental impact

Environmental thinking as a fundamental asset

Individual Conditions

Feminine Traits and Identity as Leaders (Being)

Female Leadership Behaviours (Doing)

Thinking about female leadership challenges (Cognition)

Barriers and opportunities to women entrepreneurship

Emotional abilities and challenges related to leadership (Affect)

Psychological Outcomes

Individual well being

Individual Level Phenomena

# Some Findings

- **Commitment to promote social and environmental impact**
  - ✓ Women are most affected by sustainable development decisions ("We need *women* that really know what we are doing")
  - ✓ Women are at the intersection of health and environment ("We educate, nurture and protect our children within the natural environment, we teach and show them – and live – that, from Generation to Generation"; "I do that not only because I believe in it, but it is the best way to leave the world to our grandchildren"; "It's about building networks")

- **Environmental thinking as a fundamental asset**
  - ✓ Women seem to show intrinsic values of all beings, humans, and non-humans, both living and non-living, especially related to natural resources ("I need water. But I live the water, and I respect it. It is a living entity. We must care. Its not only about making money")

- **Barriers to women entrepreneurship**
  - ✓ Acting outside of expected gender norms makes women less well-liked and more belittled, especially in male-dominant / traditional fields ("Not dresses, but jeans, bare feet and shirt"; "I'm very straightforward"; "I am not round and flowerish")
  - ✓ The need to maintain communal feminine traits is key to avoiding prejudice ("They expect me to be less assertive"; "Confidence is seen as narcissism"; "Delegation means leaving responsibilities behind")
  - ✓ Self-doubts related to contextual endorsement makes them question their ability to lead and confidence in general ("Sometimes it's too hard to think about short-term outcomes... I'm realistic, and it may be disappointing"; "Stressful situations related to others' recognition about your seriousness as an entrepreneur makes you think twice")

# Some Findings

- **Leadership mechanisms**
  - ✓ Being a women ("I'm a woman, while sometimes I don't typically show feminine elements"; "I see the feminine as part of who I am"; "My background and personality are not as expected")
  - ✓ Styles (I am aggressive, focusing on performance, independence, responsibility. I need to have control"; "At the same time I see myself as having sensitivity, LOT of listening, support and protection, orientation towards people."; "We need sorority, support other women – which is complicated")
  - ✓ Thinking about the roles ("There are NO differences in the treatment of women, I believe"; "Of course there are differences, discrimination and it is difficult to change this reality. I believe we have a long way to go"; "We know it, so we developed the ability to cope"; "The difference in treatment is also our responsibility, we don't let it go.")
  - ✓ Feelings about femininity ("I present myself in a more or less feminine way, but today, I don't care. What's important for me is what I believe"; "There are many dilemmas and difficulties of wanting to assume motherhood, role conflicts. Why don't we have laws for motherhood for entrepreneurs? So, gender matters"; "I am VERY proud of being a woman and having my own shop, my 'baby'")

- **Differential perceptions of unique skills, attributes and motivational drives**
  - ✓ Flexibility, Humility, Ability to listen, Stick-to-it-ness (patience and determination), Realistic Vision, Ownership (proprietor of their prosperity), Positivity, Attention to Details (especially related to changes in the environment),

- **The role of men as allies**
  - ✓ Men can face the same disadvantages, so women need them at their side: complementary skills, partners in business, 'strong' + 'smart'.

# Discussion

Previous studies generally choose between analysing the barriers, gender differences and the challenges women face as leaders and entrepreneurs.

In this study, from a qualitative perspective, we proposed a mutually reinforcing relationship between conditions and mechanisms that women as leaders in their sustainable businesses.

Thus, this study presents the proposal to connect leadership, entrepreneurship and sustainability, developing a broader picture regarding the role and place of women as contributors to sustainable development.

Previous studies have already shown evidence about conditions, traits, skills and other attributes and behaviors that women show as leaders and entrepreneurs in the sustainability arena.

However, this study has the merit of presenting a nexus between different levels, conditions and transformations, showing importance of understanding the phenomenon more deeply.

# Obrigada!

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